

# Child Support Report

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OFFICE OF CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT

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## Operation Collaboration

### Massachusetts Child Support, VA's Compensated Work Therapy Program Help Heroes of War and Their Children

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Long after they leave the battlefield and return home to their loved ones, many of our nation's heroes continue to struggle physically, emotionally, and financially. The ongoing, internal conflicts and traumas often lead them astray causing personal suffering and profoundly affecting the dynamics of their family life.

Beyond the 250,000 payroll garnishments processed by DFAS each month is a major opportunity for child support agencies and Veterans Affairs (VA) to work together in helping veterans reconnect with their families. Now more than ever, with two wars and thousands of soldiers returning to a weakened economy, working with veterans is certain to become a larger part of child support work.

#### Higher Rates of Divorce, Unemployment

Veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq face similar struggles to those faced by their predecessors returning from active duty. Their family and work lives have been significantly altered since their deployment. According to Paul Rieckhoff, Executive Director of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, the rate of divorce among military families has risen and the rate of unemployment among new active duty veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan was over 8 percent in 2007; 2 percent higher than the civilian rate.



Since 2007, the economy has worsened and we are still fighting two wars. The economy shed roughly 5 million jobs since fall 2008 (including 2 million in the first quarter of 2009) and although the number of deaths among our military personnel has dropped dramatically, many are still returning home injured and scarred, unable to provide for their families as they were before being deployed. Many come home to find themselves without a job, a place to live, a bed to sleep in, or family to lend them support.

Child support is among the myriad of issues new veterans need to address upon their return. Older veterans from previous wars also have unique problems, including homelessness and substance abuse often related to their military service. Many of these older veterans have not been involved with their families, either emotionally or financially, for many years.

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U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Administration for Children and Families  
Office of Child Support Enforcement

## Child Support Program's Connection to VA's Compensated Work Therapy

In 2005, an OCSE Dear Colleague Letter ([DCL-05-24](#)) explained the VA's interest in partnering with State child support agencies through their Compensated Work Therapy Program (CWT).

CWT is a vocational rehabilitation program with two goals: rehabilitate the veteran to a level of full-time gainful employment and assist the veteran to maintain that level of functioning. Veterans in the CWT program are required to pay a portion of their nongarnishable wages toward their living expenses at the VA and to save a portion of their earnings in a savings account.

CWT programs are located in more than 160 VA facilities in the United States. The [CWT Web site](#) describes participants as referred by a primary-care clinical team that assessed the veteran and determined he/she could benefit from the program. Vocational rehabilitation specialists then work with the veteran to address barriers to full-time, gainful employment in the private sector. Frequently veterans enrolled in CWT have multiple challenges, including psychiatric and substance abuse issues, physical limitations, criminal convictions, or family relationship issues.

Some CWT participants are just hoping to gain some economic stability; others also hope to resolve long-standing family concerns, including reconnecting with children they may not have seen in a decade. Often the veterans also have child support obligations with significant arrearages.

### DOR Collaboration with CWT

In September 2005, Ralph Zaccheo, Administrative Officer in the Veterans Health Administration – Psychosocial Rehabilitation Mental Health Strategic Health Care Group, with the Boston OCSE Regional Office, coordinated a conference on working with the CWT at the White River Junction (Vermont) VA facility. In the spring of 2006, to further this initiative, the OCSE Regional Office held a conference call with representatives from all six State child support agencies and New England CWT programs to discuss the program at the Massachusetts Department of Revenue's Child Support Enforcement Division (DOR).

In the past 10 years, one of DOR's most enterprising collaborations has been with the CWT. In 2003, DOR initiated a pilot project with the CWT program in the Bedford VA Medical Center. This partnership is formalized through written agreements between the veteran, VA CWT staff, and DOR. Once veterans are

employed by CWT, they are encouraged to voluntarily help support their children by paying a portion of their otherwise nongarnishable veteran's benefits toward their child support debt. DOR staff work with VA clinicians on several other child support issues, including modifying court orders, arrears management, and negotiation of settlements. DOR will also provide assistance with reinstating an already suspended driver's license.

The agreement between DOR and veterans includes:

DOR agrees to:

- Exempt from levy the first \$2,500 in the veteran's savings account;
- Exempt the veteran from the assessment of interest and penalty while a participant in the CWT/DOR program;
- Forego suspending or revoking the veteran's driver's, professional, trade, or recreational license and/or motor vehicle registration.

The veteran agrees to:

- Make weekly payments (from otherwise nongarnishable wages) to DOR in an agreed-upon amount determined by CWT, the veteran, and DOR;
- Establish a savings account in a bank or other financial institution and save a minimum of 30 percent of his or her current weekly earnings.

### More Payments, Lower Arrears, Renewed Relationships with Children

The collaboration has yielded significant results. Since 2003, veterans have made over \$303,000 in child support payments. Participants have also been able to begin making substantial reductions on their arrears.

The following are a few specific results:

- One veteran who owed over \$68,000 when he joined the program in 2003 now owes less than \$33,000.
- A veteran who owes current support plus \$8,500 in arrears has paid current support consistently since joining the CWT/DOR program, and has lowered his arrears by \$2,000 by paying more when he is able. Although he remains in treatment, he works 40 hours a week for CWT.
- A veteran who only paid \$317 in the entire year before joining the CWT/DOR program has paid



consistently since joining in August 2003. Although he can't always make the full court-ordered child support payment, this veteran has nonetheless been able to reduce his arrears by close to \$5,000.

- A veteran who joined the program in March 2003 with arrears over \$18,000 began paying immediately and was advised by his clinician to go to court for a modification of his order as one of his children had passed away. The order was modified and the arrears adjusted appropriately resulting in a reduction of about \$9,000. He continued making payments from his nongarnishable wages, paying off the arrears and closing his case. He continues to receive treatment at the VA and is still working for CWT.

The program has reaped benefits beyond financial ones for some participants. One veteran who enrolled in the program and had begun paying child support again wanted to reestablish contact with his seven children, most of whom were now adults. DOR did not have a location for the custodial parent and could not disburse the collections. The CWT clinician called one of the adult children to locate the custodial mother, which enabled DOR to disburse the money to her. In addition, the father was able to renew a relationship with his children.

### Keys to DOR's Success

The success of the CWT/DOR partnership can be attributed to several key features of the program:

- Development of strong working relationships with the wide variety of agencies and programs serving veterans;

- A program structure that identifies the resources necessary to support a special population;
- Formal agreements that detail the enforcement-related assistance veterans are eligible to receive in exchange for payment from their nongarnishable wages and responsible management of their cases;
- Liaisons at the VA and DOR who coordinate integration of these services into normal operations.



### Region Expanding Collaboration

In 2008, DOR signed an agreement to expand the pilot program and include the VA Boston Healthcare System, Veterans' Employment Resources/CWT at the Jamaica Plain and Brockton Campuses. In addition, DOR has made efforts to reach active military personnel who are preparing for deployment to educate them about child support and their court orders before arrears accumulate and enforcement measures begin.

Although DOR has made great strides in its collaborations with the VA and other veterans' programs, challenges remain to expand these programs. All of the agencies and organizations involved are unique and the overall system can be complex to navigate. Even though communication and coordination between these programs can be difficult, with perseverance and continued outreach DOR and the OCSE Regional Office are hopeful about furthering these collaborations.

*For more information, please contact Michael Ginns at 617-565-2456 or [michael.ginns@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:michael.ginns@acf.hhs.gov).*

## Economic Recovery Payments Bring **\$45.3 Million**

The first batch of child support collections from the one-time, \$250 Economic Recovery Payments (ERP) were received by OCSE and sent to States May 22. The 183,000 ERP offsets brought in collections of \$45.3 million. Intercepts from the recovery payments are expected to continue through June. Overall, the Federal Offset program has collected more than \$1.7 billion to date making this year the second time it has eclipsed that milestone. Watch this space for ERP collection updates!





# Sharing a Positive Piece of the Story

*Long-time child support program professional Mary Ann Wellbank recently asked her colleagues to recall human-interest stories that demonstrate the program's positive results on people's lives. She shares two stories below, and says, "They reinforce my pride in being a member of our great child support community." In the third story, New Hampshire child support professional Wayne Jeffrey describes his first "heartfelt thanks" from a customer—a dad who met his adult daughter for the first time.*



**D**an Welch, a Regional Manager in Wyoming, has worked in the child support program for 19 years. At one point in his career, Dan managed a grant project to reach out to incarcerated individuals with child support obligations. One of the more controversial aspects of the program was to obtain a partial attachment of the inmate's accounts, many

holding only small amounts earned by prisoners. In some cases, the intercepted amounts were so miniscule they seemed hardly worth the cost to collect.

One inmate, who had never paid a dime of child support, was furious about the monthly attachment of his meager earnings. His angry letters to the caseworker colorfully expressed his objections. As his small contribution did not add much to the household budget, the custodial parent passed the \$5 a month on to her preteen son, who used it to finance his hobby: buying football and baseball cards. He loved collecting and trading those cards so much that he wrote his father in prison to express his gratitude for this money. The son ended his letter by saying that he could not have engaged in his favorite past time without his dad!

The dad responded with a letter of his own, suggesting that his son contact the boy's paternal grandmother in a nearby neighborhood and ask her about the box of cards under the dad's childhood bed. There was a goldmine of cards dating back many years—a father's loving legacy to his son.

The story does not end here, however. The boy developed a strong relationship with his grandmother, whom he had not previously known, and, when he was 12, his father was paroled and began supervised visitation. Eventually, the father and son formed a strong bond. The father began paying regularly, and wrote a final letter to the caseworker stating that the forced payment was the greatest thing that ever happened to him!

**B**renda Kimery, a Project Manager in Oklahoma, shared a different type of story. A man came into the office seeking help with his situation. He had recently undergone an amputation of his arm due to an automobile accident, and, as a result, was unable to work in his occupation as a bulldozer operator. He was afraid that he would be unable to support his daughter.

This father was confused, depressed, and did not know where to turn. He was not familiar with programs that might be available to him, and there were no support groups in the area.

Empathizing with his situation, the caseworker referred him to an enforcement worker in the office, Tiffany Paris, who had lost an arm when she was 12. Her father also had an arm amputated, and she was very familiar with the physical and emotional challenges an injury of this nature presents.

Tiffany spent time with him, answering his questions, providing her insights, and referring him to a prosthetics supplier and a work rehabilitation program.

The dad was grateful for the time and genuine interest Tiffany invested in him, and now had some tools to cope with his missing limb, regain his confidence, and lead a positive and productive life. Best of all, Tiffany demonstrated that child support professionals truly care, and that one individual can really make a difference!

**W**hen Wayne Jeffrey received a case to process in the New Hampshire Division of Child Support Services (DCSS), Legal-Criminal Enforcement Unit, the arrearage was in excess of \$37,000—the absent parent had never paid toward his underlying child support obligation.

As Jeffrey describes, the combined efforts of DCSS, the Region I component of the national Project Save Our Children (PSOC) task force, and the Hillsborough

County-South Attorney's Office resulted in a successful prosecution and resolution. The defendant pled guilty to one misdemeanor count of criminal nonsupport and was sentenced to 12 months at the House of Corrections, with the sentence suspended for 3 years. He made a \$10,000 forthwith payment and remains on probation under supervision of the DCSS Legal-Criminal Enforcement Unit for 3 years as part of his negotiated plea.

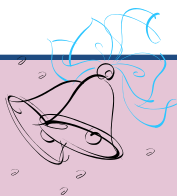
During the course of this investigation, the defendant revealed he had a brief encounter with the child's mother and had never seen his daughter, now an adult. He later expressed interest in contacting his daughter. However, after learning her address was confidential, he authorized his telephone number be released to the mother, who then

passed it on to her daughter. The mother felt their daughter was old enough to decide whether or not to contact her biological father.

The father recently thanked Jeffrey for providing a way for his daughter to contact him. Father and daughter had spoken at length on the phone and had recently spent the day together. This dad was elated at the prospect of reuniting with his daughter and becoming part of her life. He also expressed his heartfelt thanks that he crossed paths with Jeffrey.

Jeffrey says, "In the almost 10 years I've worked in the Criminal Enforcement Unit, this is the first time an absent parent has told me, 'I'm glad I met ya.'"

## Passport Denial Program



### Wedding Bells Ring In Passport Denial Collections

For centuries, June has ranked the most popular month for weddings. So this month, the Passport Denial Program reports on a few recent successes that involved plans for weddings, honeymoons, and a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration:

- California \$83,000: Family wedding in Europe
- Georgia \$32,000: NCP's honeymoon
- Louisiana \$26,000: Honeymoon plans
- Utah \$17,000: Father to see his son marry
- California \$15,800: Visiting fiancé's family in Japan
- Nebraska \$13,200: NCP and spouse paid full arrears before honeymoon
- Connecticut \$11,200: Getting married in the Philippines
- New York \$10,200: Daughter's wedding in Mexico
- Alabama \$8,800: Family wedding in Canada
- South Dakota \$7,900: Getting married in Romania
- Missouri \$5,600: Mother paid for NCP to be "best man" in Mexico
- Montana \$3,500: NCP's new in-laws to celebrate 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, children treating family to an Alaskan cruise
- Maine \$1,422: "Best man" in friend's wedding in Jamaica

Since 1998, the Passport Denial Program has collected over \$170 million in voluntarily reported lump-sum payments.

For more information on the Passport Denial Program or to report a success story, please contact Rebecca Hamil at [rebecca.hamil@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:rebecca.hamil@acf.hhs.gov).



# Region VI Tribal Session Sets Record for Attendance, Adds 'Green' to Agenda

By Jane Martin and Carl Rich  
*OCSE Region VI*

Tribal leaders and representatives from across Region VI joined Federal, Tribal, State and local officials at the Region VI HHS Tribal Resource and Consultation Session held at the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center in Albuquerque, NM, April 22 and 23. This year's attendance set a record with 190 participants, including representatives from 29 Tribes.

The session went "green" this year with handouts on a CD. The agenda, with links to the handouts and more than 100 photos, is posted online at [www.r6ta.org](http://www.r6ta.org).

The session followed the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Head Start Consultation on April 21, just before the "Gathering of Nations" annual event, also in Albuquerque.

In addition to Federal staff from across HHS, participants included officials from New Mexico and Oklahoma. Paul Dioguardi, Director, HHS Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, conveyed the Department's and his personal commitment to respect Tribal sovereignty and improve the government-to-government relationship between Tribes and HHS.

As in the past few years, the consultation was conducted in two parts: a "Tribal Resource Session" for new Tribal leaders and staff and the formal consultation session. One of the main goals of this year's consultation was to hear from Tribal leaders about their priorities for the new Administration.

Questions and comments focused on health and social services issues, especially the need for increased funding in the areas of health care and substance abuse and the need to address services for an ever-increasing urban Indian population. The main program areas were Medicare, Medicaid, Aging, and ACF, including Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Tribal Child Care, and Community programs. As expected the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), especially the availability of direct funding to Tribes, was central to many questions and comments.

Region VI OCSE attendees included Carl Rich, Jane Martin, and LaMonica Wooten. Region VI staff serve on the Regional Director's Tribal Issue Workgroup and were involved in the planning, implementation, and official recording of the meeting.



**Governor Ivan Pino, Pueblo of Zuni, addresses participants last month in Albuquerque.**



# Colorado 'DISHes' Electronic Data Exchange Between CSE, Courts

By Diane Degenhart  
OCSE Region VIII



This month, one Colorado county child support agency began using a new system to electronically exchange information and file child support cases with the court. The county is one of two that pilot-tested a data exchange system developed under a Section 1115 collaboration grant project between the State Division of Child Support Enforcement (CSE) and Judicial Department.

Named DISH (Data Information SHaring), the 36-month project is moving further into the pilot and operational stages after a recent assessment of its planning phase (September 2006 – May 2008) found both strengths and weaknesses. Evaluators believe the assessment early on is important, as some details may become difficult to remember.

The assessment noted the project's main strengths: regular participation of upper-level managers from both CSE and Judicial; establishing a management team (in charge of day-to-day operations); shared goals and objectives; establishing an elevator (mission) statement;

including user groups from both agencies; dedicated staff; and numerous presentations.

On the other hand, the weaknesses included: a difficulty in scheduling meetings (especially to include court magistrates); explaining and understanding the project and its terminology; and assuring involvement of the correct participants.

States interested in similar projects may consider these conclusions so far:

- Find a shared goal and identify joint benefits;
- Quickly clarify the project's scope and the roles and responsibilities of each agency;
- Get feedback from a broad range of end users;
- Recognize and deal with differences in agency styles, culture, goals, and terminology;
- Assign a management team; and
- Work through the case-flow process.

The project documentation is available on the Judicial Web site at: <http://www.courts.state.co.us/Administration/Section.cfm/Section/jp3children>

Overall the project shows a positive experience for both agencies and a greatly enhanced working relationship between the courts and child support offices at both the State and county levels.

For more information about the project, please contact Terry Spindler, Colorado Grants Manager, at [terry.spindler@state.co.us](mailto:terry.spindler@state.co.us) or 303-866-4452.



## Project Save Our Children

### Change of Heart in Iowa

The last payment the Iowa Child Support Recovery Unit received from a noncustodial father, who had made a \$32 payment only once before, was in 1995. One of his two children is blind and autistic and receives Supplemental Security Income. The father had once commented to the child support staff that he would rather spend the rest of his life in jail than pay the support.

The arrearage had reached \$32,000 in May 2005, when the State referred the case to the Project Save

Our Children (PSOC) Task Force for federal investigation and prosecution. He was arrested in April 2008 and sentenced that June to 2 years probation, and ordered to pay \$35,600 in restitution.

While he had been making support payments since his sentencing, in April 2009 the father had a change of heart and paid off his restitution of about \$34,900. It was good news for the custodial parent, who had become a victim of the economic times and was laid off last year.

For information about the Project Save Our Children task force, please contact Nick Soppa in OCSE at 202-401-4677 or [nicholas.soppa@acf.hhs.gov](mailto:nicholas.soppa@acf.hhs.gov).





# David Johnson

*The Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) provides for the temporary assignment of personnel between the Federal Government and State and local governments, colleges and universities, Indian Tribal governments, federally funded research and development centers, and other eligible organizations. Here, David Johnson describes his experience with OCSE Region X (Seattle) and the Washington State Division of Child Support (DCS), which have twice used the IPA.*



As my 1-year assignment from Washington DCS to OCSE in Seattle comes to a close, I'd like to share a few insights into this journey. Starting as a Support Enforcement Officer in 1991, the jobs I've held within DCS include collection team supervisor, field office manager, and most recently Executive Assistant to the Director. These varied experiences helped me appreciate the important public service our program provides, and developed personal leadership and professional skills. This IPA experience provided another rich opportunity to do the same and see the child support program through a different lens.

While a State program's primary focus is operations, policy implementation, and maximizing child support performance results, the Federal role, although parallel, is slightly different. I see the Federal role now with more clarity, respect, and understanding. Federal contributions to strategic policy development, program oversight, regulatory compliance, and audit resolution, to name just a few, are critical to the success of State and Tribal programs. There are many opportunities here for Federal staff to "connect-the-dots" and provide technical assistance to the diverse State and Tribal programs.

Linda Gillett, the OCSE Regional Program Manager in Seattle has twice used an IPA placement and thanks the State of Washington for having the foresight to recognize

the mutual benefits each program receives. Gillett says:

"The IPA experiences in Region X have surpassed my expectations. Providing a competitive process for bringing in a [staff member through] IPA surfaces those that are truly cream-of-the-crop individuals anxious to

learn, contribute, and explore the relationship between the Federal and State governments. Both of our IPA candidates have provided meaningful contributions to our work in the Regional Office, while educating and sharing their experiences to both Federal and State staff."

Giving back to my home organization in Washington State was a primary objective of mine in applying for this IPA. Being one body down is a sacrifice that DCS made

so I could do this—one that is tough in these economic times of hiring freezes and budget trimming! Learning that gets translated into tangible actions that benefit others and is shared is much more powerful than learning

in isolation. This IPA opportunity provided a great one to learn by doing and sharing.

David Stillman, Director of Washington DCS, is a strong advocate for organizational transparency and learning. He even welcomes audits as important opportunities to learn and strengthen the organization's foundation. When asked why he supported two IPA opportunities, Stillman said, "Building a quality organization requires a well-rounded approach. Not only must we find ways to enhance our systems, gather sustainable resources, examine performance data and develop viable policies, we as leaders must also accept the responsibility to develop and strengthen our workforce.

"Providing developmental opportunities for our staff, IPAs being just one such tool not only help the individual broaden their knowledge and experience base, but those around that person, and the organization as a whole.

*"The IPA provides a wonderful means for cross-agency learning and professional development."*



Whenever we can offer our staff opportunities to learn, I believe it comes back to the organization many times over in many different ways.”

A highlight for me this year has been the opportunity to travel to the other State and Tribal programs in Region X. Although the underpinnings and systems of Washington DCS may be different from those of our colleagues in Alaska, Idaho, and Oregon, the quality of people trying to find solutions to similar problems was inspiring. I feel like I have a more solid understanding of how programs

can be designed and managed in many different ways and still achieve strong performance results. I cherish the contacts I’ve made with folks in these other programs and recognize how much more alike we all are than different.

I encourage all OCSE offices and State and Tribal child support programs to start conversations with each other and think about how the IPA could enhance cross-agency learning, professional growth, and further the goals of leadership development and succession planning for both organizations.

## *National Training Workgroup*



### Is Mentoring for You?

By Alzata Ross  
OCSE

**M**entoring can greatly influence professional development in both the public and private sectors. It is about giving help and support in a nonthreatening way that recipients will appreciate and value and that will empower them with confidence in anything they want to achieve.

Mentoring is an opportunity to create an informal environment in which someone can feel encouraged to discuss his or her needs and circumstances openly and in confidence with someone who is in a position to help.

Mentoring is one of the oldest training methods and remains highly regarded and effective. It consists of a protégé and a senior mentor who is outside the protégé’s chain of supervision.

Formal mentoring programs are structured and have oversight and clear, specific organizational goals. Informal mentoring is not goal-driven and does not require structure and oversight; however, these aspects are strongly encouraged to promote a successful mentoring relationship.

#### Benefits of Mentoring

The many benefits to participating in formal or informal mentoring include increased employee performance, retention, commitment to the organization, and knowledge-sharing.

The mentor can:

- Renew his or her enthusiasm as the role of expert;
- Obtain a greater understanding of the barriers experienced at lower levels of the organization;
- Enhance skills in coaching, counseling, listening, and modeling;
- Develop and practice a more personal style of leadership;
- Demonstrate expertise and share knowledge; and
- Increase generational awareness.

The protégé can:

- Make a smoother transition into the workforce (if new);
- Further his/her development as a professional;
- Gain the capacity to translate values and strategies into productive actions;
- Complement ongoing formal study and/or training and development activities;
- Gain career development opportunities;
- Develop new and/or different perspectives;
- Get assistance with ideas;
- Demonstrate strengths and explore potential; and
- Increase career networks and receive greater agency exposure.

If your agency has a formal mentoring program, you might consider applying. If you would prefer an informal mentoring relationship, you might seek a mentor or protégé. Either way, it offers an opportunity for both the mentor and protégé to promote personal growth, increase productivity, and network within your organization.

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Contact for information:  
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***“Dollars and Sense:  
Child Support in a  
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